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Social Media and Digital Natives

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Abstract

This study examined the level of awareness of digital natives of social media platforms and associated issues with digital natives' viz-a-viz social media platforms. The study adopted the survey method. The population consist of 716 fresh undergraduate students of department of electrical/electronic of three selected Universities in the South-South region of Nigeria namely Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun covering Edo/Delta; University of Port Harcourt covering Rivers/Bayelsa and University of Uyo covering Cross River/Akwa-Ibom States. The study further adopted a sample size of 251 respondents from the population through the use of the National Statistical Service Size Calculator of Australia. Thus 251 copies of questionnaire were administered and returned. The data gathered were analyzed using simple percentages. The study revealed that the digital natives are actually very much knowledgeable and aware of the social media platform and it has also some harrowing effect on them which of course have become daunting challenges to their development. The study further revealed that despite the horrendous challenges articulated, social media portends some prospects that could be harnessed to change the shape of society and the way businesses are done. The study did not fail to draw some line of conclusions from the findings as a light to drafting some salient recommendations.

Keywords: social media, digital natives, digital immigrants, challenges, prospects

Introduction

Several scholars have shared their views on social media and digital natives especially as they describe the social media as the natural habitat of the natives. This is because they speak the language of the platforms and are apparently addicted to it that it has become their second nature. For Odii (2013), Social media are internet-based and mobile technologies that can be used to make communication interactive and participatory. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.61), view it as "... a group of internet-based application that build on the ideological and technological foundation of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content." According to them, "the growing availability of high-speed internet access further added to the popularity of the concept, leading to the creation of social networking sites such as MySpace (in 2003) and Facebook (in 2004). This apparently created the term social media and contributed to the prominence it has today. "The most recent addition to this glamorous grouping has been so-called virtual worlds; computer-based simulated environments inhabited by three-dimensional avatars" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009c).

There seem to be divergent views on what should be included as social media or an appropriate term to be used as it has been interchangeably used as new media. In the views of Kaplan & Haenlein (2010, p.60) Social media differ from the seemingly-interchangeable related

concepts of web 2.0 and User Generated Content. This has triggered further insight on where social media is coming from and its categories or classifications. Elaborating further, they noted that by 1979, Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis from Duke University had created Usenet, a worldwide discussion system that allowed internet users to post public messages. Yet, the era of social media as we understand it today probably started 20 years earlier, when Bruce and Susan Abelson founded “Open Diary,” an early social networking site that brought together online diary writers into one community. The term ‘weblog’ was first used at the same time, and truncated as “blog” a year later when one blogger jokingly transformed the noun “weblog” into the sentence “we blog.”

Kzinets (2002) noted that whereas Web 2.0 represents the ideological and technological foundation which social media debut; User Generated Content (UGC) can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media. So in the views of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2007) the term which achieved broad popularity in 2005, is usually applied to describe the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users. It further enunciated that it needs to fulfill three basic requirements in order to be considered as such; first, it needs to be published either on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site accessible to a selected group of people; second, it needs to show a certain amount of creative effort; and finally, it need to have been created outside of a professional routines and practices.

But the dynamism in the user generated content aspect of the social media brought with it a form of classification into six broad types to include; collaborative projects (for instance Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (for example, Twitter), content communities (for example, YouTube), social networking sites (for example, Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g, World of Warcraft) and virtual social worlds (e.g, Second life), (Odii, 2013, p.163).

Commenting on digital natives, Ryberg et al (2010) argued that the notion of digital natives should be examined critically; instead of being assumed to have a different set of skills, young people may instead need to develop them. Arguing further by presenting an experimental case study using a web 2.0 learning environment, Ryberg et al (2010) noted that there was a gap between educators’ intentions and students’ actual outcomes. They emphasized that there was a need for a more concerted pedagogical effort to support students in developing digital literacy skills. In addition to the raging argument, Bullen et al (2008); Bullen, Morgan, Belfer and Qayyun (2009); Bullen et al (2011) have observed that students communication preferences were not simply age or generation related. They noted that net generation students otherwise known as digital natives were only as comfortable in using computers, internet and other technologies for a variety of purposes as non-net generation (digital immigrant) students.

In developing country, where access to ICTs is far from the developed countries, Sanchez et al (2010) took a qualitative perspective, with a view to provide some empirical evidence to the discussion of ‘digital natives’ in Chile. It noted that there was no evidence to show that student’

skill levels with ICTs was distinct from the previous generations as Prensky (2001a, 2001b) claimed. Though, the research, noted some of the students use several applications at the same time when using computers, there was no evidence to show that they were multi-taskers or have any special abilities to process parallel information. This seem to align with the position that young people especially students under examination for this study (mostly drawn from the south-south region of Nigeria) are likely to become digital immigrants when they find themselves in more developed countries where other younger people apply high technologies in their day-to-day activities. There are growing numbers of competing ideas that claim to identify new generations of young people who have been brought up in a digitally rich environment and one of such is Digital Natives. This crop of new generation has been seen as exceptionally curious, contrarian, and has a global orientation as well as different ways of gathering, accepting and retaining information. One such approach has been laid through the social media platform. Unlike the traditional media that is properly guided by laws and ethical control, the social media has been infested with challenges that seem to erode on the moral, social and educational sensibilities of the digital natives. This is in spite of the touted opportunities that the platform provides in terms of available learning tools to improve on old learning skills. This study is an attempt therefore, to examine the issues associated with digital natives' use of social media.

Objectives of study

The objectives of the study are to:

- Determine the level of awareness of the digital natives of social media platform
- Determine whether knowledge of the digital natives of the various social media platforms have negative effects on the way they react or treat information.
- Extent to which digital natives use social media to their economic and educational benefits.

Research questions

- What is the level of awareness of the digital natives of social media platforms?
- Does the knowledge of the digital natives of the various social media platforms have any negative effect on the way they react or treat information?
- To what extent do the digital natives apply social media to their socio-economic and educational benefits?

Research Methodology

The survey method was adopted for this study.. The population of the study comprised 716 first year Electrical/Electronic Engineering students of three Universities selected randomly in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria which has six states of the federation namely, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom and Cross River. Therefore, in selecting the Universities, the

composition of these states were considered. For instance, Edo and Delta were once a State known as Bendel State and so the researcher selected the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun, Delta State to represent both States; Rivers and Bayelsa were once a state known as Rivers State, hence the choice of University of Port Harcourt to capture the views of young people around the two States and Cross-River and Akwa-Ibom were also once a State known as Cross River State, therefore the choice of University of Uyo to represent both States. The idea is that the students' population will reflect the candidates from such States that have proximity to the Universities. So, the students' population of the department of Electrical/Electronic of the three Universities - Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun, 116; University of Port Harcourt, 315; and University of Uyo, 285, were selected for the study. A cumulative sum of the population therefore is 716. The sample size was further reduced to 251 through the use of the National Statistical Service Size Calculator of Australia. The choice of the first year students (from electrical & electronic department) for this study was necessitated by the fact that they were admitted through Computer Based Test and had working knowledge of computer applications, therefore, could favourably fall within Prensky (2001) description of digital natives, meaning those who are comfortably adaptable to the use of technologies for their daily activities including learning. The data for the study were gathered through the questionnaire. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed with the aid of four research assistants as follows FUPRE 61; UNIPORT 100 & UNIUYO 90. All the questions were close-ended to make for easy and precise coding, computation and interpretation of findings. Most of the questions were constructed based on 5-point Likert scale with the following weighting: SA=5; A = 4; U= 3; D = 2 and SD = 1. Some questions demanded "yes" or "no" answer. Simple percentage was used to analyse the data. The formula used for computation of data is the simple percentages

- $\frac{R \times 100}{N}$ where R = Number of Response; N = Total Number of Respondents
-
- The formula for computations based on 5-point Likert scale was $\frac{AR \times W}{R \times NQ}$
-
- Where AR = Aggregate Response; W= Weighting; R= Number of Response; N=Total Number of respondents; NQ= Number of Questions

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Level of Knowledge & Awareness of the Digital Natives of Social Media (SM)

1 (a) Do you have Knowledge & Awareness of S M		
	Number	%
Yes	145	58
No	106	42
Total	251	100
1 (b) Did you obtain your awareness of Social Media via Friends & other Users		
	Number	%
Yes	230	92
No	21	8
Total	251	100

N=251

Table 1(a) indicates that 145 respondents (58%) were knowledgeable and have awareness of the Social Media platforms whereas 106 (42%) have no knowledge or awareness of it. But curiously, 230 (92%) of them in subsequent enquiry (table 1(b)) claimed to have gotten the awareness of the knowledge of Social Media platform through friends and other users of the platforms. This left an insignificant 8% to not having the knowledge from any source. This seem to actually put to question the issue of net generation of young people born into technological environment, otherwise referred to as Digital Natives by Prensky (2001).

Table 2: Knowledge of the Digital Natives of the various Social Media platform has negative effect on the way they react or treat information

2 (i) Does Social Media affect your reading Concentration		
	Number	%
Yes	66	26
No	185	74
Total	251	100
2 (ii) Does SM knowledge affect your writing language (eg. Lol, Brb, Pls)		
	Number	%
Yes	190	76
No	61	24

Total	251	100
22 (iii) Does Socia Media expose you to Porn		
	Number	%
Yes	235	94
No	16	6
Total	251	100
2 (iv) Ever encountered threat or Scam on SM		
	Number	%
Yes	96	38
Yes	155	62
Total	251	100
2 (v) Internet Inaccessibility hinder use of SM		
	Number	%
Yes	140	56
No	111	44
Total	251	100

However, on basic challenges, in Table 2 (i), one hundred and eighty-five representing 74% as against 26% said Social Media does not affect their level of reading concentration. One may doubt this when the report of the number of hours given to using Social Media is further analysed. Again, Table 2 (ii) states that 190 of the respondents, that is, 76% agree that the use of the Social Media has invariably affected their written language by the application of abbreviations in serious writings while 61(24%) noted that it has no effect on their writings. Similarly, in Table 2 (iii) 235 (94%) said that the use of social media has exposed them to pornography and only 6%(16) claimed not to have been exposed to pornography through the platform. Also, in Table 2 (iv) 62%(155) claimed not to have been threatened or encountered scam on social media platform whereas 96 (38%) noted that they have been threatened and encountered one form of scam or the other. In addition, Table 2 (v), 140 of the respondents, that is, 56% emphasized that internet inaccessibility and network challenge hinder smooth utilization of the Social media platform while 111 or 44% said it never hindered their use of Social Media platforms.

Table 3: Extent to which Digital Natives use Social Media to their Socio-Economic and Educational benefits

3(i) Ever used SM for business transactions		
	Number	%
Yes	135	54
No	116	46
Total	251	100
3 (ii) Ever Got Safety or Health tips on SM		
	Number	%
Yes	251	100
No	0	0
Total	251	100
3(iii) Do you support scrapping of SM		
	Number	%
Yes	46	18
No	205	82
Total	251	100
3 (iv) Ever used SM for e- dating		
	Number	%
Yes	46	18
No	205	82
Total	251	100
3 (v) Can SM enhance economic and educational growth		
	Number	%
Yes	165	66
No	86	34
Total	251	100
3(vi) Can SM enhance Job Hunt		
	Number	%
Yes	250	99.6
No	1	0.4
Total	251	100

Relating to the prospects, in Table 3 (i), one hundred and thirty-five of the respondents representing 54% said the beauty of the Social Media is that they have used it for e-commerce, that is, to transact business, but 116(46%) said they have never tried it. Indeed, in Table 3 (ii),

the 251(100%) of the respondents overwhelmingly accepted that they have got safety and health tips via the Social Media platform. This also goes to show that one way or the other, the respondents have some reasonable knowledge and awareness of the social media as against the apparent divide on the knowledge and non-knowledge already discussed. Consequently, in Table 3 (iii), 205 of the respondents, that is, 82% was against the scrapping of the social media while only 46 (18%) supported the idea of scrapping it. Also, in Table 3 (iv), 205 (82%) said they have never adopted the social media for e-dating whereas 46 (18%) of the respondents noted that they have used Social Media for e-dating. The table 3 (v) further indicates that 165 (66%) claim that the use of Social Media can affect positively economic advancement, educational, scientific and technological development; whereas, 86, that is, 34% said it has no effect on the economic, educational, scientific and technological development. Table 3 (vi) about 250, that is, 99.6% of the respondents further noted that social media aid and enhances job hunts through group circulation of advertorials and messages shared on the platform.

Discussion of findings

Research Question One

What is the level of knowledge of the digital natives of the social media platforms?

Table 1 (a-b) gives an explicit answer to this research question. According to the table 1(a), out of 251 respondents, 145 (58%) had some level of awareness and knowledge of the Social Media as against 106 (42%). It is surprising that amongst those referred to as digital natives by the virtue of being in technological age, only a paltry of them claims to be very knowledgeable and aware of various social media platforms. Conversely, in Table 1(b) out of 251 respondents, 230 (92%) claim to have been acquainted of the Social Media through friends and other users. In other words, they were influenced by their peers and users to begin visiting the social media sites. This goes to give more support to a common belief that the social media is most inclined to pressure the youths towards certain behaviour that could be positive or negative relationship. Oyenuga (2015) asserts that the influence of the social media in the modern day society is immeasurable. He elaborated that it has become the most accessible source of information in the present day society.

So, in the views of Jones, et al, (2010) and Kennedy, et al (2008), rather than showing that there is a Net Generation of digital natives who are naturally proficient with technology, empirical evidence from a variety of countries shows that students' experiences with technologies are far from universal. They explained that not all students were equally competent with technologies and their patterns of use varied considerably when they moved beyond basic and entrenched technologies to newer emerging or recently introduced technologies.

Research Question Two

Does the knowledge of the digital natives of the various social media platforms have any negative influence on the way they react or treat information and therefore pose a kind of challenge to them?

Table 2(i-v) tend to provide answer to this research question. Table 2(i) states that out of the 251 respondents, 66 (26%) said that the knowledge and use of the social media affects their reading concentration, while 185 respondents representing 74% said it cannot affect reading concentration. This position may require further probing in subsequent study. Whereas, in table 2(iii) 234 respondents representing 94% said their knowledge and awareness of the social Media has severally exposed them to pornography, only 16, that is, 6% noted that they have not been exposed to porn. On Table 2(iv), 96 respondents representing 38% said they have been bullied or got one form of scam or the other on social media while 155(62%) said that they have never encountered any form of bullying or scam. Table 2(v) indicates that 140 respondents (56%) noted that internet inaccessibility hinders utilization of the social media platform while 111 (44%) did not believe so. According to Idoko (2016), instead of increasing productivity, social media (networking) is a big distraction to adolescent lives today. He explicated further that one devastating example of how adolescents are distracted by social networking is with using cell phones while driving, young people are always on their phones, looking at social media sites and connecting with others. He also emphasized that adolescents use their phones while they are sitting in class, at work, walking to class, or even while they are shopping. “Basically, you will find young people on their phone anywhere and everywhere”, he concluded.

Research Question Three

To what extent do the digital natives apply the social media to their socio-economic and educational benefits as prospects?

Table 3 (i-vi) give answers to this research question. Table 3(i) indicates that out of the 251 respondents, 135 representing 54% use the social media for business transactions otherwise known as e-commerce and e-transactions while 116(46%) said they have not explored the option. Table 3(ii) shows that the 251 respondents, that is, 100% have explored the social media in getting health and safety tips. This gives some credence that the social media is useful to the digital natives in obtaining some vital information to their safety and health. Likewise Table 3(vi), 250 respondents representing 99.6% said that the social media aids job hunt through advert circulation on group platform and information exchange. A critical enquiry on Table 3(iii) indicates that 205 (82%) was vehemently against scrapping of Social Media while same number said they have never engaged in e-dating.

Nwokpoku (2016, p.29) notes that the number of retail e-commerce transactions taking place through smart phones in Nigeria spiked by 73% within the first quarter of 2016. This means that the rate of deployment or use of the social media in business transaction is steadily increasing due to larger patronage by young people. Also supporting the great potentials inherent in the social media use, Jones (2011) opine that this social trend raises fundamental questions about the

relationships between the emerging network society (digital natives) and the organization of learning environments in both formal education and training. That is to say, the broad and quality of the platform could enhance learning, business development, socio-economic advancement as well as technological growth.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn. Firstly, the study concludes that peer influence promoted the knowledge and awareness of the digital natives on the social media platforms which also have direct influence on their behavioural pattern in the use of the various platforms. It is noteworthy that by virtue of their growing up with technological artifacts, these crop of young people have become engrossed and affected by digital applications and technologies such that they cannot do without adopting or the use of some of the social media platforms. They are therefore, inseparable and continuously explored technology to resolve their daily challenges. But the degree to which they can fit into same classification in developed countries is subject of another study as they may suddenly become immigrants in comparison to the kind of facilities available in those countries.

The study also made it clear that in spite of the knowledge and awareness of these digital natives of the social media and using them to tackle life problems, it was obvious that it has brought some fundamental challenges their way. It noted that their knowledge and awareness of the social media instead of advancing their educational pursuit as it ought to, their addictions to the social media created some enormous challenges in form of distractions, distortion of language skills and apparent exposure to immoral and cyber frustrations.

The study concludes that in spite of the challenges that bedevil the use of social media by the digital natives, there are greater prospects. It has brought innovation to the business environment through e-commerce and e-business transactions; it has revolutionized the education sector; it has become a platform to elongate lives through health and safety information and most fundamentally through its interactive power and utmost rich to a diverse of humanity, become a platform for the young people to obtain job information and seek for better career opportunities. This then establishes the importance of social presence and media richness theory to this work.

Recommendations

The effectiveness of the social media especially on the digital natives in the South-South region of Nigeria could be channeled towards positive use of the platforms as the challenges it presents to the society are enormous and daunting. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations become germane:

- The digital natives in the South-South region should have a new attitude orientation by minimizing attention to social media platform, especially if not directly applied for educational purposes.

- Educational institutions should cultivate the opportunity of students being addicted to social media use by developing educational software that can provide solutions to a lot of the educational quest and challenges of the digital natives. By that way they would be constantly and effectively engaged in the application of social media for positive learning.
- There should be policy direction by government to engage the social media on health and safety orientation such that its wide reach and richness would assist in passing quality information to the teeming population of young people. Part of the orientation would tackle the challenges of cyber scam and immoral engagements.
- Government should further harness the interactive opportunities inherent on social media to expand the scope of e-commerce and e-business transact especially to sustain the cashless economy and to enable it drive an innovative economic transformation.

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